

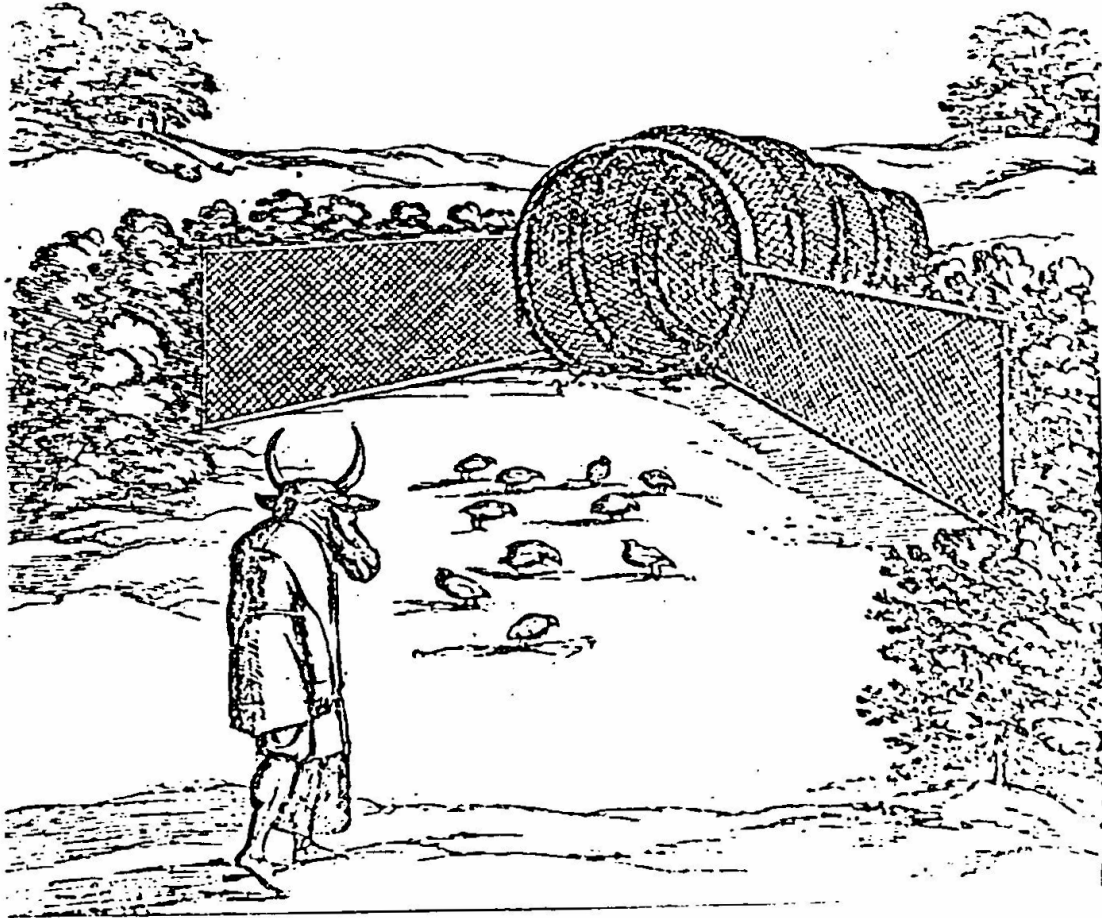


DR. SEVERIN, THE PARTRIDGE, AND THE STALKING-HORSE

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To Dorothy Severin's diverting excursus on the *boezuelo*¹ I should like to add just two pedantic ornithological footnotes.

1. The first, which may seem a quibble, is that Rojas's *perdices* are not Partridges,² nor the Italian *starme* which figure in her illustration (p. 32, and reproduced below).



If we may discount the Rock Partridge (*Alectoris graeca*) of the eastern Mediterranean (Italy and Greece), which makes only an occasional accidental appearance in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, and the Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*) from North Africa, which can be found in a restricted area around Gibraltar, we have just two partridges to contend with. Although their ranges overlap, notably in France, where they are distinguished as the "grey partridge" and the "red partridge" (*perdrix grise* and *perdrix rouge*), so far as English and Spanish are concerned the use of the specific terms is somewhat analogous to "American, South American/norte-americano, americano". That is to say, the northern species, *Perdix perdix*, is in English simply "Partridge", while the southern species, *Alectoris rufa*, carries the qualifier: "Red-legged Partridge".

In Spain, the northern species is confined to the northern coastal strip of Galicia, Asturias, Santander, and the Basque Provinces, where it is most commonly known as *pardilla* or *pardillo*. Technical writings, but not so far as I can determine before the nineteenth century, may call it *perdiz pardilla*, now its official name in the checklist of the Sociedad Española de Ornitología; but *Autoridades*, s.v. *perdiz*, simply appends a rather vague note to the effect that there is another kind of *perdiz* which does not have red legs. *Perdiz* in Spanish (now officially *perdiz común*) designates the Red-legged Partridge, which, although it can be found in Britain (but not in Ireland, Wales, Devon and Cornwall, or north of a line drawn between the Mersey and the Wash) is much rarer than the Partridge.

But the simple map of the distribution of these two species of partridge, namely the Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) in northern Europe (Scandinavia, Germany, British Isles), the Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) in the south (Spain), with a zone of overlap in northern Spain, France, and southern England, is totally upset in Italy, where the Partridge, *starna*, may be found throughout the country, while the Red-legged Partridge, *pernice*, appears only in the northwest. In short, the Italian method of capturing *starna*, Partridges, while it may correspond with the Spanish method, alluded to by Rojas, of capturing *perdices*, Red-legged Partridges, was designed for a different species of bird.

2. Dr. Severin expresses (p. 33) some scepticism about the effectiveness of the *boezuelo* for capturing "flying game". One might well be sceptical of the elaboration of the apparatus employed, including the stalking-horse itself, but of the effectiveness of the method there can be little doubt. All the European members of the *Phasianidae* (pheasants, partridges, quails) demonstrate a singular reluctance to take to the air. When alarmed they crouch; when threatened they run; and even when they do fly, the flight is rarely sustained. Furthermore, no bird, with the exception of a few nocturnal predators, of the nightjars (American English "night hawks"), and of the species which may on migration fly high through the night, is ever inclined to take to the air in the dark. Like the *starna*, *perdices*, when disturbed, will first crouch, and then scurry for more distant cover.

The elaborate structure illustrated by Antonio Valli da Todi (and *Celestinesca*) is certainly superfluous: a simple net spread on the ground, the leading edges raised with small twigs, is perfectly adequate. Nor is

there the slightest need to dress up as a cow. One man, preferably accompanied by a moderately well-trained dog, can drive a flock of partridges into a net. The stalking-horse is, of course, an effective method of approaching other game, major game such as deer, or different birds, such as geese. There is no reason to be sceptical of the effectiveness of the *boezuelo*, the lantern, and the elaborately constructed nets. What one might view with a certain modern superiority is only the superfluosness of all that apparatus. Indeed, rice soaked in gin is a simple and highly effective alternative. But then again, in earlier and more leisurely times people were perhaps less concerned with economies of time and motion, and more disposed to try to do a job properly.

NOTES

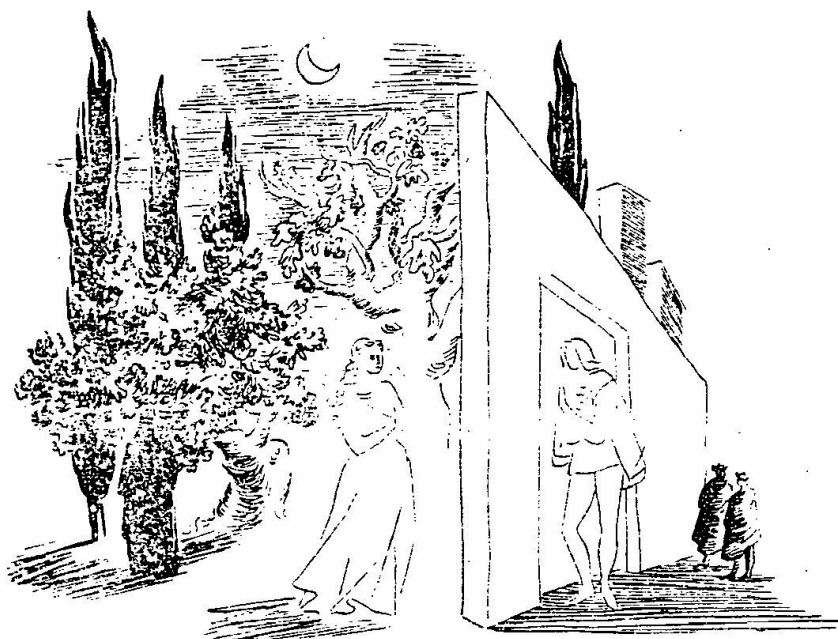
¹ Dorothy S. Severin, "'El falso boezuelo', or the Partridge and the Pantomine Ox", *Celestinesca* 4, i (1980), 31-33.

² I follow the accepted zoological convention of using an initial capital for the name of a species, and lower-case for a non-specific term, which may refer to two or more related species, a genus, two or more related genera, a family or, in popular usage, to superficially similar but phylogenetically unrelated animals. The sources of my information may be found listed and analysed in *A Glossary of Spanish Bird-Names* (London: Tamesis, 1966).

Lalifo. Parmeno. Sempromio.



_rabado de Valencia: J. Joffre, 1514.



EL AUCTO DOCINO

"por entre las puertas. . . ."

Ilustración al XII acto por Miguel Prieto.
(México: Ed. Leyenda, 1947)